

Naval War College Review

Volume 22
Number 2 February

Article 15

1969

The Silent Weapons

H. C. Atwood Jr.
U.S. Navy

Robin Clarke

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Atwood, H. C. Jr. and Clarke, Robin (1969) "The Silent Weapons," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 22 : No. 2 , Article 15.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol22/iss2/15>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Clarke, Robin. *The Silent Weapons*. New York: McKay, 1968. 270p.

The author of *The Silent Weapons* acknowledges that his writing is essentially a synthesis of previously published materials, but he has actually attempted far more than this. As editor of the distinguished British publication *Science Journal*, Mr. Robin Clarke is adept at constructing a literary piece but less adept at pleading a cause—the abolition of chemical and biological weapons. Early in this book Mr. Clarke points out that the military trend in this nuclear age has been referred to as the “escalation of brutality,” but that the end point has not yet been reached. Looming over the horizon, he writes, are chemical and biological weapons—weapons unique (particularly in the case of the biological variety) in that they have been invented for the single purpose of annihilating civilian populations. World War I propaganda stirred nations into a frenzy of indignation when gas warfare was first used in 1915, and until perhaps 10 years ago the idea of using toxic chemicals and disease-producing organisms to win battles was regarded by most as the worst form of military brutality that could be employed on the battlefield. Now military officials are using the argument that these weapons could be the most humane ever invented. Mr. Clarke argues that the United States, while energetically conducting research to overcome the technical impediments to CBW, is chipping away at the psychological barrier to CBW by the repeated use of riot gases and chemical defoliants in Vietnam. While there can be times when it is more humane to use a relatively harmless chemical weapon than conventional arms, the author feels that it is only a small step from tear gas to mustard gas; from nerve gas to botulinum toxin; from toxin to plague. “Because of the dangers of opening Pandora’s box, the only safe course is to use neither chemi-

cal nor biological weapons at all during war.”

By and large, *The Silent Weapons* can perhaps best be described as a useful primer on the political, scientific, and strategic aspects of CBW. For the reader who is looking for a very “readable” presentation of historical fact, chemical and biological technology, and problems encountered in the control of CBW, it is highly recommended. For the person looking for a solution to the often publicized problem of control of CBW, *The Silent Weapons* will be of no help. Mr. Clarke’s solution, described by him as a “long-shot,” offers an insight into the dilemma that the author still faces upon completion of a year of research, study, and discussion:

By denying their support to any defensive or offensive work on either kind of weapon system, they [the scientific community] could effectively remove the threat of massive chemical or biological war in the future. They could do it quickly. They could do it tomorrow. They could do it finally. For let there be no mistake about this. No government can develop further weapons in this field without the help of scientists. A denial of their willingness to cooperate would put an end to chemical and biological escalation and there would be nothing that any democratically elected government could do about it.

H.C. ATWOOD, JR.
Commander, U.S. Navy

Maxwell Institute on the United Nations, 3d, 1966. *International Organization in the Western Hemisphere*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1968. 262p.

In a series of four documented monographs written by professional observers of the inter-American scene, this volume incisively identifies the pressing problems confronting the inter-American system and explores their roots and effects on relations between the states of Latin America on the one hand, and between the Latin-American states and the United States